

Writers
of the

PURPLE SAGE

Newsletter of the Ridge Writers

East Sierra Branch, California Writers Club

April 2024

"ALASKA'S FIDDLING POET" WILL SPEAK (AND PERFORM) APRIL 4

Novelist/poet/fiddler Ken Waldman will present an evening of writing, poetry, and song for our Thursday, April 4 general meeting, starting 6:30 p.m. in the meeting room of Ridgecrest Presbyterian Church, 633 W. Las Flores. Public welcome. No admission charge.

His novel *Now Entering Alaska Time* (also the focus of our "Read the Book, Meet the Author" tea at 2 p.m. in the Pizza Factory party room the same day) came out in 2022. Along with its publication, he simultaneously released three CDs. Altogether, his 12 books range from full-length verse collections to acrostic poems for kids, a novel, and a memoir about his life as a touring artist. This visiting artist at over 250 schools in 35 states has led workshops from Alaska to Maine.

He spent all December 2023 in Fairhope, Alabama at the Wolff Writer's Cottage. In addition to immersing himself in several long-ongoing projects, he planned his 2024 dates, including two nights of New York City showcases at the iconic theater district club, Don't Tell Mama. From there follows a mix of workshops, shows, and school visits in New York, Pennsylvania, Michigan, and Illinois before a big writers' gathering in Kansas City.

His Ridge Writers program will combine speaking with music and plenty of Q&A. He'll have books and CDs on hand to sign and sell.

We hope to see you there, and remember to bring your friends.

LOVE IS A DOUBLE ACT: CAROLE AND BILL WAGENER ON HYBRID MEMOIRS

Report on the March Meeting written by Daniel Stallings



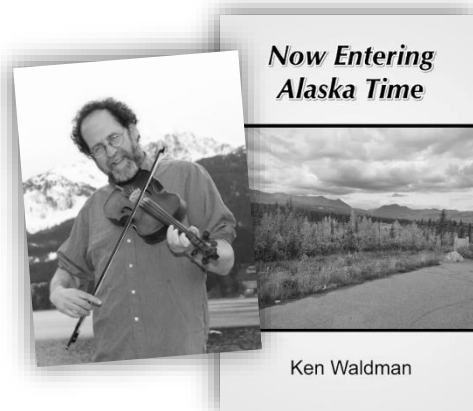
Carole and Bill Wagener share a laugh at Read the Book, Meet the Author about the memoir.

On March 7, Ridge Writers were treated to a double dose of an entertaining wife-and-husband double act of Carole Wagener, who brought her husband, Bill, along to two events. Bill and Carole's love letters from their first year of marriage when he

was overseas during the Vietnam War form the backbone of the hybrid memoir, *The Hardest Year*. Yet it is Carole's experiences as a newlywed grappling with the reality of war that is the heartbeat of her story. As she told us at Read the Book, Meet the Author, "Memoir starts with 'me.'"

While Carole's story is the locus of the memoir, there may not have even been a book had it not been for her husband's passion for genealogy and record keeping and his convincing her to hold onto those old love letters from their first years together when they moved.

At the general meeting that evening, Carole shared more of her story as a writer. For example, as a member of the Coastal Dunes branch of the California Writers Club, she has submitted work to her branch's anthologies such as *Shifting Sands*, the first Coastal Dunes anthology from 2017 where she entered "everything she had ever written."



Mark Your Calendar...

April 4 – Ken Waldman, author, poet, and traveling fiddler

May 2 – Tony Piazza, Coastal Dunes Branch film historian and author of seven mystery novels.



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Interior Design



Have you ever thought about how a word sits on the page? How the ink lines razor themselves into the paper? How the letters twist and turn and bend to a multitude of yoga positions (Downward Facing Diphthong) to create entirely new effects on a reader? That is the gift of formatting. And at times, it's a facet of writing I feel some writers may overlook in the act of creating a new work. There's a deep magic to the essential interior design of writing. Where does a paragraph split? What words stand alone? To celebrate the upcoming National Poetry Month for April, I thought it would be fun to explore how formatting is part of writing.

Recently, while editing for our 2024 edition of *Planet Mojave* (see page 4), I got the pleasure of reading one of our newest member's poems. One dealt with the emotional upheaval during and following the 2019 earthquakes. Her wonderful imagery sat in a very regular pattern and structure. Nothing wrong with that. The poem was absolutely excellent. However, one of the real gifts of free verse poetry is a freedom from regular structure, meter, or rhyme scheme. You are released from the pure rigor of school grammar. Words can sit wherever they please. Because a poem is an emotional response designed to produce an effect on the reader.

For example, e e cummings (and yes, that's one of the ways to style his name, often the most familiar one) was a famous 20th century poet whose modernist free verse poetry radically shook up conventional poetry in his time. He used idiosyncratic syntax (his words and sentences and phrases were formed based on his own whims rather than grammatical rules) and lowercase spellings as part of his artistic expression. Lines would stagger and jolt across the page. Breaks would be placed where he wanted them. Words would be slammed together into one monolith word (like onetwothree). It didn't need to be grammatical. It was *expressive*. That's the fun of writing. You are creating emotional expressions.

I asked our poet if she wanted to play with how her words sat on the page for her earthquake poem. She crafted this gorgeous story of before, during, and after, a feeling that echoes a three-act play. "Before" and "after" could be written with this very calm, controlled format we are familiar with, but I inquired if she wanted to embrace a little chaos during the section about the actual quake. Bring a little e e cummings-esque syntax to the party. To me, that helps sell the story she is sharing of the calm before the storm. As we read, the poem's structure is suddenly shaken during the quake. Words tumble down lines (and the author's already strong repetition of words in this section buoys this effect). The poem itself is visually shaking on paper. Then the eerie calm that follows. A deceptive calm. Formatting helps highlight the poet's strong visual language and takes the work from 2-D to 3-D. I made only suggestions with possible examples, and the author adapted them herself to suit her personal vision for the piece and her voice. Therefore, I encourage you to think of formatting as the finishing touch, a way to help highlight special emotions or meanings in your words. Don't forget your interior design.

Ridge Writers Leaders

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To reach any of these leaders, use ridgewriters@yahoo.com.

Visit our Facebook page at www.facebook.com/RidgeWriters and our website CWC-ridgewriters.org.

SoCal Writers Showcase



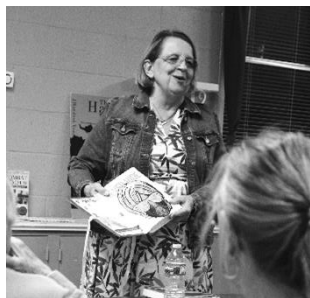
The southern region of the California Writers Club maintains the "zine"-format socialwritersshowcase.com, containing monthly content from members, ranging from fiction, nonfiction/essays, and memoir, to poetry, interviews, discussion on writers' life, the craft, and news.

The Writers of the Purple Sage is the monthly newsletter of the Ridge Writers, East Sierra Branch of the over 100-year-old California Writer Club. Except where otherwise stated, all articles in this publication may be printed without special permission in newsletters of branches of the California Writers Club and in the State Bulletin, subject to the following conditions:

- The author's name and original publication credit must be printed with the text.
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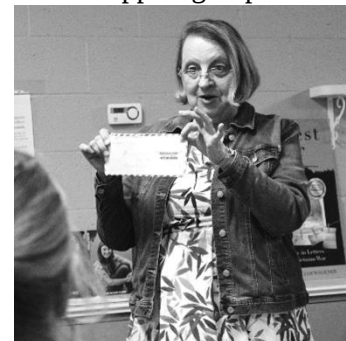
Contact the editor by mail at P.O. Box 484, Ridgecrest, CA 93556 or by email, ridgewriters@yahoo.com. **SPECIAL NOTICE:** Photographs for publicity and newsletter uses are taken at all Ridge Writers events. By entering the venue, members and guests are granting permission that their likenesses may be used for publicity purposes.

Her work also appears in their subsequent anthologies *Across a Distant Shore*, *A Drift of Golden Sand*, and *Turning Tides*. Yet, one of the most moving parts of her story of her authorial genesis came from her talking about her breast cancer diagnosis, treatment, and recovery, which included time with a support group where she had been encouraged to create and keep a journal/scrapbook full of images, clippings, drawings, writings, words...anything that created meaning for her. A truly powerful artifact.



Carole shares with us her scrapbook she created while undergoing treatment and recovery in 2008.

The path to creating her memoir began with Bill finding the shoebox of old letters in their garage, one example seen in the picture at right. Writing a book was not her dream at the time, but she crafted a series of ten reasons why she felt she should create *The Hardest Year*, including a desire to preserve the history of the year 1968-1969, wanting to show the contrast of a nation at war and a nation anti-war, to write about war from a woman's



perspective, to engage in some self-healing of her own difficult emotions from that era, and to help others going through similar situations and feelings. Bill also shared his experiences of the Vietnam War, including a double-handed humorous/harrowing tale of his flight back home.

Carole closed her program reading an excerpt from *The Hardest Year*. We thank both her and her husband for speaking to us.

* * *

READ THE BOOK, MEET THE AUTHOR

Buy your book at Red Rock Books and read it in advance. The ticket price of \$35 includes tea and scones in the party room of Pizza Factory at 2 p.m. on that Thursday, a copy of the book that the author will autograph to you, entry in a gift basket drawing, and convivial conversation with the author and group. If you purchase a ticket but cannot attend at the last minute, please cancel by noon Wednesday. If you do this, we can refund part of the ticket price, and if you leave the book for us, we can have the author autograph it to you or to a name of your choice.

Thursday, April 4, 2024 – Ken Waldman, author of *Now Entering Alaska Time*.

Thursday, May 2, 2024 - Tony Piazza, author of *A Murder, Well-Scripted*.

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2024 Allison Aubin Scholarship for Young Writers

This year, the Eastern Sierra Branch of the statewide California Writers Club, locally known as Ridge Writers, plans to award the Allison Aubin Scholarship for Young Writers to local students preparing to enter college to study writing. The winner will earn a \$500 cash prize on behalf of the club. Students will write a 500-word essay on the topic “Why do I write, and what do I want to do with my writing career?” We started accepting entries on March 1st and all entries are due on March 30th. Judging will occur in April with the winner informed in May.

* * *

Art + Poetry Workshop

Saturday, April 27, 2024 at the Ridgecrest Branch Library (131 E. Las Flores Ave.)
1 to 3 p.m.—Grades K through 5: 1 to 2 p.m. & 6 through 12: 2 to 3 p.m.

Everyone is welcome to attend! Admission is totally free!

Ridge Writers is presenting a workshop for all ages, under the care and direction of Vice President and Youth Coordinator Janis Kunz, on combining visual art and poetry in honor of National Poetry Month. Activities will center on using ekphrasis (describing a piece of visual art with words), drawing your own pictures and writing about them, and making shape poems where the words form the shape of the object you're writing about. Although we are aiming this event for our junior writers, the workshop is open to all.

Our Jack London Award Winners

We're proud of the Ridge Writers who have won the Jack London Award, the highest recognition each branch of CWC can give outstanding members.

The award was presented annually until 2005, and subsequently only once every two years.

Maryann Butterfield 1997

Casey Wilson 1998

Rlee Peters 1999

Judy Dutcher 2000

Curt Danhauser 2001

Judy Martin 2002

Donna McCrohan Rosenthal 2003

Holly Dworken Cooley 2004

Liz Babcock 2005

Allison Aubin 2007

Steve Wersan 2009*

Margaret Luebs 2013

Daniel Stallings 2015

Julianne DiBlasi Black 2017

John Anderson 2019

Andrew Sound 2021

Janis Kunz 2023

*With a special Charmian London Award to Fran Wersan

2024 Spring Bulletin

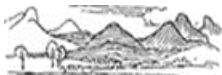
From the *Bulletin* Editor: "The Spring 2024 CWC *Bulletin* has arrived! The *Bulletin* is a PDF publication emailed to all members on a quarterly basis. It is full of useful and inspiring articles about writing and publishing, as well as upcoming events at the branches and 'news you can use.'"

It was emailed on Tuesday, March 19, the sender was identified as 'California Writers' and the Subject line read 'CWC 2024 Spring *Bulletin* is here!'

Of special interest to the members is the Spotlight feature, in which we give a plug to book launches, awards, inclusions in anthologies, and other good news. All they need to do is send a 50-word blurb and a JPEG of their book cover to editor@calwriters.org."

Ridge Writers does not endorse any contest, conference or publishing opportunity that appears in our newsletter. We merely collect and share news of opportunities for our membership. Member discretion advised.

The East Sierra Branch (Ridge Writers) is the California Writers Club branch serving the eastern part of Kern County. Over the mountains on the west side of the county is our Bakersfield-based sister branch, Writers of Kern.



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PLANET MOJAVE

In 2011, Ridge Writers compiled, edited, and published our first branch anthology titled *Planet Mojave: Visions of a World Apart*. Themed around Ridgecrest, the Mojave Desert, the Sierra Nevada, and Death Valley, the collection featured member stories, essays, articles, poems, flash fiction, and more.

We are coming up on thirteen years since that first printing, and our branch membership has grown and changed in those years. We want to give our current membership a chance to publish in our branch's anthology, so we are releasing a new 2024 edition of *Planet Mojave* as our major project for the year. We invite our current members to submit work for this new version. All the original material will be retained.

Submission guidelines:

*All pieces should be themed to our area.

*Members already in the first edition may submit up to two new pieces. Poems have no word count limits, but fiction and nonfiction are limited to up to 1500 words. We will also add new 55-word stories.

*Submissions will be reviewed and subject to editing by Editor Daniel Stallings. **All submissions should be sent to him at beinmyhaus@hotmail.com.**

*If you are new to Planet Mojave, we will need your author bio for the back of the book. No longer than 150 words each, please.

*Deadline for submissions is **June 1 at 11:59 p.m.** to allow us to finish the book by the Petroglyph Festival. If you have questions, feel free to email us.

SCENES FROM LIVES OF SERVICE

HIGH DESERT VETERANS OF
WWI THROUGH DESERT STORM

By RIDGE WRITERS
EAST SIERRA
BRANCH
CALIFORNIA
WRITERS CLUB



Cover Photo by Laura Austin

Our book featuring stories of High Desert veterans, *Scenes from Lives of Service*, is on sale at Red Rock Books and through mail order. To order through mail, send a letter and check to Ridge Writers, PO Box 484, Ridgecrest, CA, 93556; buyer should state name, mailing address, number of copies wanted, and enclose a check for \$32.50 each. Ridge Writers members can buy the book for \$25 each.

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